



# THE WONDERFUL AND THE OBSCURE

volume 1

# Rodd Keith



*From Happy Puppy prez Lee Rosevere:*

This compilation of song-poems by the great Rodd Keith is from the private collection of Bob Purse, music-lover and music-maker (see Happy Puppy for 'The Many Moods of Bob Purse').

I've been a fan of Rodd's a little over 15 years, when I first heard the MSR Madness CDs, and started collecting whatever song-poems I could. In Canada, there aren't a lot of them to be found. I imagine they are much more common in the USA (given the nature of many of the poets were from the States, this isn't surprising).

However, it does make it difficult to discover them – ebay auctions have gotten tremendously over-priced since the PBS "Off the Charts" songpoem story documentary, and that's why I can thank Bob for sharing his massive collection on his blog The Wonderful and the Obscure.

He posts not just Rodd Keith tracks, but many many other wonderful gems that you should really visit his site to find for yourself. However, since I'm a big Rodd fan and Bob's online archive is massive, I thought it would be fun to put together this compilation of Rodd's tracks that Bob has previously shared and I also thanks Bob for giving me permission to do this.

Some of the tracks might not seem all that special, or "weird", but not everything Rodd did was like that. However, there are always little moments in the songs that make them special and make them distinctly unique to his productions.

As Bob puts it, "I'm not really part of the Rodd cult - I enjoy his records about on a par with any other song-poem artist or label, loving some and finding others deadly dull, and everything in between - but I know I'm in the minority with that viewpoint."

1. Rod Rivers and the Big Action Sound - Before I Go Out (Action 1040a) (Valliere Hancock)
2. Rod Rivers and the Big Action Sound - The Splendor of Love (Action 1040b) (Valliere Hancock)

"Here's a great one from Rodd Keith, masquerading as Rod Rivers and the "Big Action Sound", on the Action label.

This song title "Before I Go Out" isn't all that intriguing, but the lyric is great - when lyricist Valliere Hancock uses the phrase "Go Out", she adds "Like a Light", and the rest of the words make it clear that she's talking about all the things she wants to do and learn before she dies!

Rodd's brilliant use of the Chamberlain, as well as his vocal stylings, only add to the fun. I'd be surprised if this wasn't recorded around the same time as the equally jazzy and atmospheric "Tom Dooley Last Will and Testament" (from the Norris the Troubadour album, and which everyone reading this words should hear, if you haven't already). Like that song, this has a cool, laid back vocal that nonetheless fits the unusual words.

For the B-side, the same writer submitted another song, "The Splendor of Love". She shows none of the spirit that makes the A-side so interesting, going so far as to borrow the opening line from a former #1 song which was heavily identified with that same opening line, "Love is a Many Splendored Thing".

Easily the best thing about this song is the Chamberlain track that Rodd created for it. At times, it reminds me of some of the John Lennon Mellotron experiments which are available on bootlegs (the Mellotron being essentially the same instrument as a Chamberlain). There is a moment in the backing track from about the 1:45 point to the 2:00 point which I find to be nothing short of gorgeous, and which certainly shows off Rodd's keyboard genius."

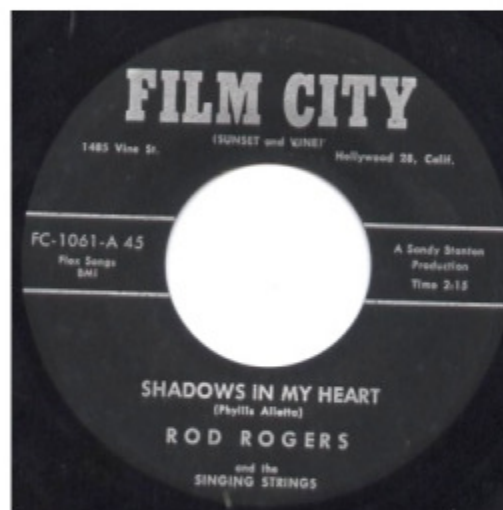
3. Rod Rogers - Shadows in My Heart (Film City 1061a) (Phyllis Alietta)
4. Rod Rogers - I Walk a Lonely Street (Film City 1061b) (Phyllis Alietta)

"I sure do like that Chamberlain sound."

5. Rod Rogers - If I Had a Million Dollars (Kondas 3305a) (Gus Kondas)
6. Rod Rogers - Sometime Tomorrow (Kondas 3305a) (Gus Kondas)

Like several other song-poets, Gus Kondas submitted his lyrics to multiple companies, then released the resulting recordings on his own label, in his case, the creatively titled Kondas Records label. He would send his records to radio stations, along with a little note, sometimes attached to the 45 sleeve. A different Kondas record in my collection came with a separate note which read: "Compliments from the Kondas Music Pub. Co. If you like them please give them a play, if you don't, just throw them away, Thanks." Today's EP came in a sleeve bearing this sticker:

Program Director & D. J's:  
 Playing Better Songs will help  
 make a Better World, Play them  
 please, Thank you. From Kondas  
 Music Pub. Co. (ASCAP)



This EP contains three songs from the Film City label, and one from the Globe Records factory. The first two songs feature Rodd Keith, as Rod Rogers. I particularly enjoyed the leadoff track, "If I Had a Million Dollars", because it contains not only the relatively rare feature of Rodd harmonizing with himself - a nice sound - but it briefly features three Rodds singing together at once, something I've only heard on a few records. And of course, it's got that great Film City Chamberlain sound, one of my favorite musical sounds in the world.

The second Rod Rogers track, "Sometime Tomorrow", actually features quite a bit more three part singing than the previous song, although the song doesn't draw me in nearly as much as the first one does. Still, it's nice to hear what this amazing one man band could do:

The flip side starts off with a samba type song titled "If I Ever Needed You (I Need You Now)". I have little doubt that that's Rodd playing the Chamberlain, but the identity of the singer is eluding me. He sounds familiar enough that I know I've heard him before, but the name he is given here - Gene Acres - sounds like a joking reference to "Green Acres", and to my knowledge this name has never shown up on another documented song-poem record.

#### 7. Rod Rogers and The Orchestra and Chorus – My Dream

(Film City 2069) (*J. Katona-L. Loth*)

#### 8. Rodd Keith - The Old Swinging Gate (MSR 194-1) (*Harriet Jenni*)

#### 9. Rodd Keith – Treasure (MSR 194-2) (*Arthur Renshaw*)

...the Chamberlain backing heard on this early MSR release of Rodd Keith's "The Old Swinging Gate" is not exactly the best accompaniment to what appears to have been an attempt at a countrified vocal performance and setting

#### 10. Rodd Rogers - Rock and Roll is Back Again

(MSR 587-2) (*Patrick O'Hare*)

#### 11. Rodd Keith – You, They All Say You (Preview 1161-1) (*Francesca Contesa*)

#### 12. Rodd Keith - Cry Upon My Shoulder (Preview 1161-2) (*William A. Kellogg*)

Both sides of a Preview single: I particularly enjoy the clunky lyrics of "You, They All Say You".

#### 13. Rodd Keith - Away From the Crowd (Preview 1167a) (*J. M. Rivera*)

#### 14. Rodd Keith - Be Wise (Preview 1167b) (*Donald Lyons*)

The A-side, "Away from the Crowd", is a bit of supper club pop, complete with a horn section, and is remarkable for it's length - over 3 1/2 minutes - rare for a song-poem single, and a minute more than the time listed on the 45.

The flip side is "Be Wise". And that's always a good idea.



**15. Rodd Keith and the Raindrops - Country Boy**

(Preview 1281a) (*David Nagele*)

...and speaking of peppy settings going with downcast lyrics, here's a happy sounding country setting about having a son die in a war. I'm certain that no non-English speaker, hearing this record, would be able to guess the subject matter.

**16. Rodd Keith – Suddenly** (Preview 1365) (*Leroy E. Bowser*)

**17. Rodd Keith – Tear Drops** (Preview 1310a) (*R. G. Houston*)

**18. Rodd Keith - Lonesome For You** (Preview 1310b) (*Flossie Waltz*)

A nice single from the early days of the Preview label, from none other than Rodd Keith. The A-side is a nice piece of country flavored pop, titled "Tear Drops". I really like the interplay between Rodd and the backing vocalists on the bridge, particularly on the unlikely line "combing my hair".

The flip side, "Lonesome For You", is not nearly as interesting to me, sounding a bit like the bland material that Mitch Miller produced for Guy Mitchell in the early '50's. It does, however, have the benefit of having been written by one Flossie Waltz, who is (or was) the rare person whose name could also be a dance step.

**19. Rodd Keith - Goodbye My Darling** (Preview 1217a) (*Betty Stanley*)

**20. Rodd Keith - Why Don't You Sing a Happy Song**

(Preview 1217b) (*Yolanda Bridges*)

Here's a low-numbered (ie early phase) Rodd Keith Preview single which I have been enjoying recently. I'm a fan of the b-side, but others who particularly enjoy Rodd may find at least as much to enjoy in the a-side.

"Why Don't You Sing a Happy Song?" is downright goofy, from the spoken introduction, to the appropriately peppy, poppy setting, and especially with this moment in the lyrics.

"Got a few ragged clothes, but they look mighty neat!"

It's also interesting that the only reasons we're given to encourage our singing of "a happy song" are that things in the singer's life are going well enough for him to be happy.

I don't know if the timing on the label (1:50) was a typo, or was deliberately misrepresented so as to not make the song-poet feel cheated with what was actually a 92 second track.

The flip side, "Goodbye, My Darling", features a nice driving pop sound, an excellent vocal, a catchy tune, and a neat double time bridge. It's the sort of Rodd Keith sounds like it could have been a minor hit around 1966. Unfortunately, my pressing is off center a bit, which becomes particularly apparent during the fadeout.



Liner notes by Bob Purse

Label scans and vinyl-to-digital transfer by Bob Purse.

For more song-poems, visit Bob's blog: [bobpurse.blogspot.com](http://bobpurse.blogspot.com).

This compilation produced by Lee Rosevere.

Please also check out [roaratorio.com](http://roaratorio.com) to purchase more music by Rodd Keith.

Also, [tzadik.com](http://tzadik.com) sells the excellent "I Died Today" compilation.

